

Dexter

ON SOME SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS

AT HARVARD AND YALE,

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

THE LIBRARY

The Ontario Institute  
for Studies in Education

Toronto, Canada



LIBRARY  
THE ONTARIO INSTITUTE  
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION  
TORONTO, CANADA

FEB 25 1968

*Berndt Hall*



ON SOME  
SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS AT HARVARD  
AND YALE,  
BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

BY  
FRANKLIN BOWDITCH DEXTER.

---

FROM PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, AT THE  
ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 21, 1893.

---

Worcester, Mass., U. S. A.  
PRESS OF CHARLES HAMILTON,  
311 MAIN STREET.  
1894.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

## ON SOME SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS AT HARVARD AND YALE, BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

---

IN the catalogues of graduates of Harvard College down to 1772, and in those of Yale down to 1767, the names of the students in the successive classes are placed—not alphabetically, as now, and not as at Oxford or Cambridge in the order of application for admission, or according to scholastic merit, but—in an order supposed to indicate the rank of their respective fathers or families.

Such a system was a wholly natural consequence of the conditions of life to which the founders of Harvard had been accustomed in the mother country; and although no directly corresponding usage is traceable at either of the English universities, where these founders had themselves been trained, yet I believe we can connect the system logically with the distinctions there observed. Thus the revised matriculation statutes adopted at Oxford in 1565, and in force in the time of the Harvard founders, adjusted the scale of fees for the ceremony of matriculation in accordance with the social rank of the fathers of the candidates, from 13 s. 4 d. paid by the son of a prince, duke or marquis, down to 4 d., the charge to *plebei filius*, which would naturally be understood as the son of a yeoman, and 2 d. to a servitor.<sup>1</sup> The phrase at Cambridge corresponding to *plebei filius* was *mediocris fortunæ*, and in practice both were, I fancy, elastic enough to include a large part of the ordinary students. The most careful authorities on Oxford and Cambridge antiquities give us nothing which is more

---

<sup>1</sup>Register of the Univ., vol. 2, pt. 1, 165 (Oxford Hist. Soc. Publications, X.).

to the point than such regulations as these ; and the system as developed at Harvard may be fairly described as a natural deduction from the structure of university society, as of general society, in the England of Elizabeth and James the First.

I have been favored with comments on the subject from several English correspondents, and I may be allowed to quote at length from a private letter of Dr. Venn, senior fellow and historian of Caius College, Cambridge, with whose view of the matter such other eminent authorities as Mr. J. Bass Mullinger, the librarian of St. John's College, Cambridge, and historian of the University, and the Rev. Andrew Clark, fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, seem to coincide substantially. Dr. Venn says :—

“As we all know, the University classification was a *threefold* one, viz., into fellow-commoners, pensioners and sizars ; and this has been unchanged, at any rate since the commencement of the matriculations in 1544. But from Elizabethan times, and perhaps earlier, our classification at Caius was a *fivefold* one : (1) Fellow-commoners, containing the young men of family, and Masters of Arts ; then come three classes of pensioners, sometimes described as *primi*, *secundi* and *tertii ordinis*, or more particularly : (2) Pensioners to the Bachelors' table, containing besides the Bachelors, other undergraduates ; (3) Pensioners to the Scholars' table ; to this belonged not only those who were actual scholars, *i. e.*, on the foundation, but also those who intended to try for scholarships (so I judge) and probably other students who could not pay the higher fees for the other tables ; (4) ‘Pensioners’ simply, corresponding to the bulk of the modern students ; (5) Sizars, who waited on the Fellows, etc., and ate what they left. This arrangement was strictly speaking one of the *table* at which the student had his meals ; but it is plain that some sort of social precedence was thus indicated :—the fees were successively higher from the Sizar upwards ; the lad of better



social position takes one of the second or third class, if he is not an actual fellow-commoner; the division of the graduates' fees at Commencement Day, etc., for the purpose of feasts, follows the same arrangement, and so on. I have come in fact on frequent indications that these successive grades implied a certain social precedence. This arrangement was in full work, with us, throughout the seventeenth century, but gradually decayed during the eighteenth. To some extent it was an arrangement in 'order of family rank'; for, the fees being higher in the upper tables, youths of rank were more likely to be found in them; but there was no attempt to arrange trades and professions in any order of precedence."

The substance of the English custom is well expressed by Mr. Mullinger, who writes that "the students themselves, on entering, defined their own status by the fee which they paid. That they themselves paid fees according to their means and social position was quite different from any such distinction being insisted on by the College."

But however the founders of the first New England college may have departed from the customs which they left behind them, it is no wonder that a system which had gone on for two generations at Harvard, should have been adopted in turn by the ministers who gave shape to the college in Connecticut, as part of the natural order of collegiate discipline.

A more direct copy, in Harvard's first century, of a social distinction peculiar to the transatlantic Cambridge, was the enrolment of a few of the richer students as Fellow-Commoners, that is, strictly, undergraduates entitled to take their meals at Commons at the Fellows' table.<sup>1</sup> But this badge of aristocracy, never frequent, had nearly passed out of use before the institution of the collegiate school in Connecticut, where indeed there would have been little or no opportunity for its cultivation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Such were Wyllys, class of 1653; Saltonstall, 1659; Browne, 1666; Wainwright, 1686; the brothers Vassall, 1732 and 1733.

It is, of course, impossible at this distance of time to recover and estimate in their due proportions all the considerations determining the arrangement of class-lists formed on a scheme of social rank ; my hope is merely to bring out some of the general principles which guided the action of the college authorities, and incidentally to gather some information on social grades in the community.

It seems to have been the duty of the President—or Rector, as he was commonly styled at Yale until after 1745,—or of the President in conjunction with the resident Fellows or Tutors as a Faculty, to arrange the list of each class, soon after entrance into college. The earliest formal record at Harvard of this sort, begins with the beginning of the first volume of the Records of the Faculty in 1725, where under date of December is the entry : “Twenty and seven Scholars were admitted into the College this year. They were placed or disposed in the Class by the President and Fellows, as follows.” The list of names of the class as it was afterwards graduated in 1729 is then given, and similar entries occur annually thenceforth. With the class of 1732 the residence of each member is added, and his age by years. Instead of the last item, in the class of 1741, the exact date of birth is substituted, and in this form the record continues until the custom expires. The period of the academic year when the list was thus made out varied from September until June, being most frequently in March or one of the adjoining months.

At Yale the only corresponding records are those contained in some private note-books kept by President Clap, which cover the classes from 1747 to 1757 and from 1761 to 1767 ; and the lists are supplemented by occasional memoranda of items respecting the standing and fortunes of the parents, jotted down by the President apparently for his own information and guidance ; the lists in the Faculty books at Harvard, being mere formal records, contain, so far as I have noticed, only a single instance of like nature,

where the father of a certain candidate in the class of 1734 is described as a shipwright.

The lists thus determined near the opening of the college course stood unchanged ever after, excepting when (very rarely) some error in the arrangement, due to imperfect knowledge, was subsequently corrected, or when an individual was punished by a change of place, or "degradation," a penalty next to expulsion in severity, on account of misdemeanors.

Many instances could be cited to prove that a rise in the father's social or official position during a son's college course was not allowed to disturb the class arrangement as already fixed.<sup>1</sup> A pertinent illustration is the case of Joseph Parsons, at the foot of the class of 1697; at the beginning of his senior year his father was promoted to a judgeship of the Hampshire County Court, but without affecting the college rank of the son.

All the evidence tends to show that the problem of arrangement was, as we should expect, a perplexing one. In the earlier generations at Harvard, family pedigree seems to have been the paramount consideration, while the father's individual standing was distinctly secondary; but as a longer interval separated the colonists from their English home and its definite laws of precedence, the more difficult became the determination of family rank in communities as homogeneous as these of New England. It still remained true, however, to the latest date, as I believe, both at Harvard and at Yale, that the general social standing of the family was taken into account, as well as the father's personal status, in deciding a student's grade; and I think I do not exaggerate in saying that, at Harvard especially, there was continually a conscious effort to keep up the respect due to family names of past distinction by concessions of this sort on the college roll. This influence was

---

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings, VIII., 33.

less felt and less welcomed at Yale, where the constituency was always more democratic and more homespun than that of the elder university. And yet, even here, the prestige of an honored ancestral name was always valued. To illustrate: John Still Winthrop leads the Yale class-list of 1737, although his father by no means filled such important public station as the fathers of the three or four youths next below him; but the Winthrop name was second to none in New England in renown, and carried its own justification for unrivalled precedence. Taking the whole of the class-lists at both colleges subject to this arrangement, Winthrop is the name which is uniformly found in a higher position than any other occurring as often (ten times in all); six of these times it holds the first place, being surpassed in that special pre-eminence by only two other names, Hutchinson and Russell, each of which occurs seven times in that rank.

To continue the statistics on this head, it appears that the next below the names already mentioned, in frequency of occurrence in the first place, are Dudley and Saltonstall (five times each). The names most notably frequent, after Winthrop, in a uniformly high grade are, Davenport and Wainwright (each six times, and always in the first four places); Quiney (nine times, not lower than the first five places); Danforth (nine times, in the first six places); and Oliver (twenty times, in the first seven places).

Not a single name occurring more than once stands uniformly at the head of the list; and the Connecticut name of Wyllys is the only one occurring as many as four times, which is always in either the first or the second rank.

It may be worth while in this connection to note the frequency with which the leading family names are represented in the two oldest universities of New England, throughout their history. Taking as guides the latest catalogues of graduates (Harvard, 1890; Yale, 1892), it is not unexpected to find that the name of Smith leads all the rest in either catalogue, though by far more common at

Yale than at Harvard.<sup>1</sup> At Harvard, on the other hand, Brown is a strong second,<sup>2</sup> while barely fourth at Yale,<sup>3</sup> where the second place is still held by Williams,<sup>4</sup> a good third at Harvard;<sup>5</sup> and the remaining place, third at Yale,<sup>6</sup> and fourth at Harvard,<sup>7</sup> is given to Clark. If the lists of the two colleges are combined (omitting duplicates), the order of names is, Smith, Williams, Clark, Brown, Adams, Hall, Allen, White, Johnson, Jones, Davis, Parker, Green, Hubbard,—these being all which have as many as a hundred representatives, and also all which at either college count up to two-thirds of that number, besides the Baldwins and the Stronges, who are exceptionally frequent in the Yale catalogue.<sup>8</sup>

In estimating family rank, I believe also that an ample fortune was taken prominently into account, and that some of the perplexing cases, where persons of undoubted family claims are placed low in the class-lists, may in part at least be explained by straitened paternal circumstances. This consideration had, as I conjecture, its influence in relegating the sons of the Rev. Charles Chauncy in the classes of 1651 and 1657 at Harvard to some of the lowest places; I may quote also, as suggesting a similar effect, a memorandum made repeatedly by President Clap of Yale in his notebooks, in the times of a greatly depreciated currency (about 1753-4), where he describes the parents of certain students, low in grade, as “of middling estate, much impoverished.”

The point suggested should not, however, be pressed too far. While I am convinced of an exceptional regard paid to wealth, and of slights put upon some who failed by this test, I ought also to direct attention to a small class of instances in the early decades at Harvard, where certain persons of good family appear by the records to have paid their way in part by such services as waiting in the hall or bell-ringing, and yet to have retained the full rank to which

---

<sup>1</sup> 154, Harvard; 219, Yale.    <sup>2</sup> 120.    <sup>3</sup> 89.    <sup>4</sup> 120.    <sup>5</sup> 119.    <sup>6</sup> 111.    <sup>7</sup> 107.

<sup>8</sup> Seventy-three Baldwins here to 22 at Harvard, and 67 Stronges to 12.



they were entitled. These cases present no inconsistency with the general rule, family rank being the normal standard, and wealth or poverty an accessory of varying importance, as connected with the different problems of each new class-list.

Aside from general family rank, then, in estimating the claims of a student, the comparative wealth or poverty and the professional or official standing of his father were mainly to be regarded. So far as I have seen, the mother's family, and her earlier alliances in case of a prior marriage, were not much heeded. An instance in point is that of Samuel Pomeroy, the lowest in rank of the Yale class of 1705, a son of a country farmer, whose wife, however, had previously been the wife of a clergyman, a Harvard graduate, and the son of a distinguished President of that seminary. Neither did the fact of a student's having had a brother graduate at college and enter on a learned profession, have usually any perceptible weight, nor do remoter relationships seem to have interfered with the application of general rules. A single instance of the practice in a brother's case is that of Simon Tufts, below the middle of the class of 1724 at Harvard, and own brother of the Rev. John Tufts, who held relatively the same position in the class of 1708, and was now established in the ministerial ranks. In the case of Isaac Browne, last in the Yale class of 1729, and a brother of the Rev. Daniel Browne, Yale, 1714, we may conjecture that the elder brother's defection to episcopacy, with Rector Cutler, subjected his young relative at least to an unconscious prejudice, and certainly prevented any substantial advantage accruing to his favor. Somewhat like this would seem to have been the fate of John Brainerd, in the class of 1746, who entered Yale a few months after his brother David's expulsion for contumacy, and so, although the son of a dignified magistrate, was placed next the foot of his class by the implacable Rector Clap; the oldest brother of the family had been ranked fourth out of twenty-three in

the class of 1732,—a totally different treatment from that now accorded to the youngest. The small effect of remoter relationships may be seen in the case of John Norton, who is placed next the last in the class of 1671 at Harvard, though a nephew of the Rev. John Norton and of Sir George Downing, and a great-nephew of Governor Winthrop.

I think it also tolerably clear that, in some cases at least, non-residents of the colony or province in which the college was situated were under some disadvantage as compared with residents. So, in one of the earliest Harvard classes (1649), a son of Governor Eaton of New Haven yields precedence to a son of the Rev. Nathaniel Rogers of Massachusetts Bay, who represents a family surely not superior in blood to the Eatons. A similar consideration may have been a cumulative force in depressing the rank of the sons of the Rev. Charles Chauncy of the Plymouth Colony in 1651; and it may help to explain the like fortune of a son of the Rev. Thomas Hooker of Connecticut in 1653. So also at Yale, in the class of 1705, David Parsons, the son of a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, was ranked below the sons of decidedly less prominent laymen who were of Connecticut birth and residence. The motto for guidance was not apparently "*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*," so much as "Charity begins at home."

In some early cases it seems as though the father's death had affected the son's rank unfavorably. An apt illustration is that of Joseph Haynes, Harvard, 1658, the son of Governor Haynes of Connecticut, who is put below Joseph Eliot; while in the class of 1656 the order of the names of two brothers of these students is exactly reversed; the only apparent difference in the respective circumstances being that when the class of 1656 entered college, Governor Haynes was living, and that two years later he was dead. Another instance of marked difference in the treatment of two brothers is seen in the case of the sons of the Rev.

Nathaniel Rogers (Harvard, 1649 and 1659); and here again the much lower grading of the younger son coincides with the father's removal by death. I doubt, also, whether if Governor Dudley had been alive, his son would have stood second in the class of 1665.

Another case, that of Ezra Reeve (Yale, 1757), may be cited as evidence that loss of standing on a father's part affected the son's position. Reeve's father was deposed from the ministry for intemperance about 1748, and presumably for that reason the son is not ranked along with other ministers' sons in his class, but is placed in a distinctly inferior group.

We come next to the cases of degradation for personal reasons. In the Yale experience these occurred but rarely. At Harvard, on the other hand, at least during the period covered by the extant Faculty Records, this punishment seems to have been more familiarly used and with a somewhat different scope from that which is generally assigned to it. From these records I should say that in common usage degradation was resorted to, not with the purpose of being a final, but rather as a temporary expedient. At least I should estimate from a hasty inspection that in fully five-sixths of the cases recorded, repentance and confession secured, after a few months, restoration to the original standing.

Yet, after all abatements, degradation remained as a sober reality for a few cases. The earliest suspected instance is that of James Ward, next the foot of the Harvard class of 1645, the son of a clergyman, who is known to have been otherwise punished for the crime of burglary in his junior year. In the class of two years later, William Mildmay, the son of a knight, is placed below all his classmates; and such a fate can hardly have been the result of anything but personal misconduct. Again, at the foot of the class of 1658 stands a son of the Rev. Thomas Shepard; and in contrast with the rank of another son who was graduated



earlier, this perhaps implies some censure in his college experience. Another case may be that of Bezaleel Sherman, last in the class of 1661, the son of a clergyman, a graduate of Cambridge, England, and a Fellow of Harvard, who deserved on all family grounds a higher place. A notable case is that of Samuel Melyen, class of 1696, who was degraded three places in his sophomore year for connection with a trifling disturbance, and whose unavailing efforts after graduation to secure reinstatement have found their way into print<sup>1</sup> in our own day.

During the last forty-five years of the continuance of the system at Harvard, the evidence of the Faculty Records should be conclusive as to the number of cases in which the penalty of degradation was permanently enforced; and if I have counted correctly there are but eight such cases mentioned. The occasions of punishment in these instances are of the familiar sort,—such as stealing fowls, insulting tutors, Sabbath breaking, and in one case (most severely dealt with, involving a drop from a place well within the first half of the class to the very foot) stealing combustibles and making a bonfire. Details are unnecessary, unless one case may serve as an index to the others, where a country minister's son, entering college in 1748, at thirteen and one-half, and being convicted of the mild crime of breaking windows, was thenceforth degraded two places, and yet lived to be a most respected citizen, at the head of the medical profession in the State of his residence.<sup>2</sup>

The list of similar incidents at Yale begins with the name of Jonathan Dickinson, of the class of 1731, the namesake of an honored father, a leader of American Presbyterianism, but himself notorious in college and afterwards as a disreputable fellow; his place at the foot of the class can only be accounted for as in retribution for some of his offences. The extant Record of the Acts and Judgments of the Yale

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings, viii., 33-35, 231, 232.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ammi R. Cutter of Portsmouth, N. H.

Faculty begins with December, 1751, and I cite in passing the initial entry as characteristic of the times and manners :—

“Whereas Holmes, a student of this College, on 10th of Nov<sup>r</sup>. last, being the Sabbath or Lord’s Day, travelled unnecessarily, and that with a Burden or Pack behind him, from beyond Wallingford to this place; which is contrary to the Divine and Civil Law, as well as to the Laws of this College :

“It is therefore considered by the President, with the Advice of the Tutors, that the said Holmes shall be fined 20<sup>d</sup>. sterl., viz. 20/ O. Tenor.”

Holmes was a great-uncle of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, and spent his life as a highly respected minister of the Gospel, so that it is a relief to find a subsequent entry to the effect that “the abovenamed Stephen Holmes made a public Confession in the Hall for the Crime abovesaid, and therefore the abovewritten Judgment was not put in Execution.”

At this period, under the despotic and somewhat petty rule of President Clap, disorder on the part of the students abounded, and was met with nagging punishments. Probably there has never been a time in the experience at Yale when antagonism between the authorities and the students has been so ingeniously and assiduously cultivated; but as to the penalty of degradation, the Faculty Records from 1751 to 1767, including more than half of Clap’s presidency, mention only four cases,—the first being that of Isaac Burr, of the class of 1753, a native of Worcester, the son of a clergyman, who was moved down three places, late in his junior year, as a part of his punishment for repeatedly kicking a senior—after what provocation does not appear. Three of his classmates are known to have suffered a like penalty at some earlier period in their course, and three later cases are recorded, for such misdemeanors as playing with dice, and bringing rum into the college buildings without leave.

To return to the general principles of arrangement: there can be no doubt that important relations of the students' parents to the college or to other colleges were recognized in the ranking. Thus it usually happens that the sons of Trustees and other college officers or benefactors are given an advantage in comparison with that otherwise to be accorded them. Thus the youngest sons of the Rev. Charles Chauncy, already twice referred to, made a great stride, in the Harvard class of 1661, after their father had become President, above the position of their elder brothers, who entered from a poor country parsonage in Scituate. A striking exception is the case of Joseph Noyes, Yale, 1709, son of the senior Trustee; and I can only account for the low place assigned him (seventh in a list of nine) by a reference to his father's rank at Harvard, which was the lowest in his class, and by supposing that perhaps a modest adherence to the standard thus set was in conformity with the father's own preference.

The cases of students who had been previously enrolled in some other college were not treated by a uniform rule. Such a case was that of Benjamin Woodbridge, who leads the entire Harvard roll, as the first name in her first graduating class;<sup>1</sup> but his claim for precedence over Downing, a nephew of Governor Winthrop, and Bellingham, a son of the Deputy-Governor, rests, I suppose, on the special cir-

---

<sup>1</sup>I do not know how to explain the fact that the list of this first Harvard class is handed down to us in two different forms,—one as given in the Catalogue of Graduates, and another as given with the Commencement Theses in "New England's First Fruits." The two lists are as follows:

CATALOGUE OF GRADUATES.

Benjamin Woodbridge.  
George Downing.  
John Bulkley.  
William Hubbard.  
Samuel Bellingham.  
John Wilson.  
Henry Saltonstall.  
Tobias Barnard.  
Nathaniel Brewster.

NEW ENGLAND'S FIRST FRUITS.

Benjamin Woodbridge.  
George Downing.  
William Hubbard.  
Henry Saltonstall.  
John Bulkley.  
John Wilson.  
Nathaniel Brewster.  
Samuel Bellingham.  
Tobias Barnard.

cumstance that he had spent nearly four years at Oxford, so that practically he was merely examined for a degree. In the next three cases which I have noticed,—those of Edward Taylor (Harvard, 1671), Nicholas Morton (1686), and Benjamin Prat (1737),<sup>1</sup> admission to advanced standing placed a man at the foot of his class; and the same was true in the rare instances where a freshman after admission was able by superior work to secure promotion to the class above him. But in later usage the rule was changed; and I have noted at least four cases in the Yale classes from 1760 to 1767, and six at Harvard in the classes from 1761 to 1771, in which students admitted to advanced standing from other colleges or from private preparation were inserted in the class-lists according to their proper rank.

Passing now to the consideration of the treatment of professional standing, it should be said at once that, contrary perhaps to a prevailing impression, there was never any disposition to exalt the ministerial order above laymen of distinction. For example, in the Yale class of 1705, the earliest in my own college which affords any illustration of this point, the leading place is given to a representative of one of the honored names of Connecticut, distinguished, however, exclusively in civil life; and below him stands a scion of the Mather family, already one of the most conspicuous in the clerical annals of New England, who was moreover a special candidate for promotion as the son of a Trustee of the college. The same class-list illustrates in its lowest name, Samuel, son of Deacon Medad Pomeroy of Northampton, another fact of kindred interest, that the office of deacon and that of ruling elder, in the New-England churches, were not of themselves regarded as titles to special distinction.

At Harvard a like treatment of the sons of the clergy is abundantly manifest, as we should even more confidently

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings, viii., 35, 36.

have expected. With all the reverence so justly paid by the early generations in Massachusetts Bay to their educated ministry, the clergy themselves brought with them a full appreciation of the relatively inferior position of the parish minister in their old homes, which served as an additional bulwark to protect and exalt the claims of family aristocracy. The Oxford usage in matriculation fees, already referred to (page 3), put the clergyman's son (when any distinction was made) much nearer the yeoman than the gentleman, and it took time for clerical prestige to gain an independent foothold.

An examination of almost any of the larger class-lists at Harvard or at Yale will illustrate the assertion that the sons of ministers were not unduly honored; but the wide difference between the constituencies of the two colleges appears strikingly in the statistics on this point. Yale in this early period drew her students largely from the simple, secluded communities of Connecticut and the country round about it, in which the clergy were to a large extent easily the leading figures; accordingly, in the Yale classes arranged on this system which contained both sons of laymen and sons of ministers, we find that twenty-six are headed by the former and twenty-seven by the latter. At Harvard the circumstances were different from the first; and especially as time went on, the families enriched by commerce in Boston and neighboring towns were represented in large proportions, and with them a much more numerous and important contingent of public officials than ever grew up in Connecticut, where the machinery of government was every way simpler and less ambitious. At Harvard, then, the statistics in regard to the parentage of the names leading the class-lists are, for the seventeenth century, twenty-nine sons of laymen and sixteen sons of ministers; while after this date the laity practically crowd the clergy entirely out of the first place.

Inspection proves conclusively that when professional



standing was combined, especially in the early decades at Harvard, with slender fortune or obscure family connections, the professional standing was likely to be slighted; illustrations of this are very frequent. And down to the latest period we find that the groups of ministers' sons are obliged to make way continually for the sons of civilians of no very special distinction. I recall, for instance, a case in the class of 1763 at Harvard, where Nathaniel Noyes, who was first ranked twelfth on the roll, was afterwards found to be the son of a Justice of the Peace, and when this not very notable fact was ascertained—in addition to the other claims which he had for position—he was moved up five places, thereby passing in his upward progress one or two sons of ministers.

It is evident from several cases as late as the middle of the eighteenth century that practitioners of medicine had not by that date gained a secure position as professional men. In fact, I do not recall a single instance of that period in which a doctor's son, with no other recommendation in his favor, takes any special rank. In one such case, that of Nathaniel Ruggles (Yale, 1758), President Clap's private memorandum is "Justice of the Peace, Deacon," with not a hint of a learned profession, and this puts the youth tenth in a class of forty-three; while Clement Sumner the son of another physician who did not happen to be also a Justice and a Deacon, is thirty-third in the same catalogue.

The legal profession had earned an earlier and fuller recognition, sufficiently accounted for from its public connection with the courts of justice and with all the visible machinery of governmental authority.

Next to the three learned professions ought to come that of the teacher; but not so in the regard of these college authorities. At least, we find such examples as that of Henry Rust, son of a schoolmaster in Ipswich, Massachusetts, who is allowed to stand last in the class of 1707 at Harvard.

Occasionally in these inquiries one stumbles on an interesting suggestion of the relative status of various other employments. A very early instance is in the Harvard class of 1653, where Joshua Long, son of an inn-keeper in England, takes precedence of Samuel Whiting, the son of a clergyman, who was in turn son of a Mayor of Boston, England; no more emphatic testimony could be given to the honorable regard paid in the old country to that public trust of keeping a house of entertainment, which we know to have been at that date a prerogative of citizens of the first rank. So, at Harvard in the class of 1667, John Harriman, son of an early inn-keeper at New Haven, led his class, including thus among his social inferiors the sons of the Rev. Peter Hobart, an English university graduate. As time passed, however, this particular occupation failed to maintain the same rank: witness the instances of Peter Ruck (Harvard, 1685) and James Greateon (Yale, 1754).

Probably the general expectation of those who have not looked into the matter would be that with a little study an exact order of precedence, to cover nearly all cases, could be evolved, — somewhat perhaps like this: first, sons of Governors, then in due succession sons of Deputy-Governors, of Councillors or Assistants, of ministers, of judges, of lawyers, of doctors, of members of the General Assembly, of justices of the peace and quorum, of militia officers, of merchants, of farmers, of mechanics, and so on. But if I make my meaning clear, it is evident that in practice the arrangement was governed by no such simple formula. Considerations of ancestral distinction, of family estate, of paternal position, and the like, entered into each case in ever-varying combinations, precluding the possibility of any cut-and-dried system; though it seems as if finally the increasing difficulties of the plan had made it necessary to fall back on a more definite method of classification by groups of certain fixed characters. I do not profess to have fathomed the intricacies and perplexities of the subject, nor

to be able to explain particular instances which look like the arbitrary vagaries of personal partiality or prejudice. No rule and no explanation that I am aware of can meet the case of Henry Saltonstall, son of a Knight and of an Assistant in the Government, standing seventh in the first class at Harvard, except it be the inference that in the first attempt at such a classification a settled plan was not consistently followed; nor that of Samuel Phipps, son of a carpenter of undistinguished lineage, outranking, as second in the class of 1671, a Sewall and a Mather, a Thatcher and a Norton; nor that of the two Woodbridges, both sons of clergymen of note, but relegated to the foot of the class of 1701, unless they were late in entering. At Yale, where the conditions were in every way less complex, I know of not a single anomalous or inexplicable case, besides that of Joseph Noyes, already mentioned. In every comparison of results between the two institutions the marked difference of numbers should be borne in mind; taking even the most favorable period, the last fifty years of the system, the average class at Harvard was nearly fifty per cent. larger than the corresponding class at Yale.

But I may be asked, in view of these unintelligible cases in the earlier generations at Harvard, whether it is certain that the system as we have it later was actually in vogue there from the beginning. Such a question has been raised repeatedly, as by Mr. John Ward Dean in his *Memoir of the Rev. Michael Wigglesworth*<sup>1</sup> (Harvard, 1651), but I do not see how the negative can be seriously maintained, with the facts already known. I believe that the archives at Harvard have not yet been thoroughly examined in order to trace the early references to the custom; but even if we had no direct evidence prior to the time of Samuel Melyen, about half a century from the founding of the college, it is, I hold, practically impossible to account for the system then

<sup>1</sup>Pp. 33-35.



in use, except by a development of some such plan introduced by the founders themselves, and a result, as I have intimated, of their experience in England. As for the case of Wigglesworth, which has led Mr. Dean to doubt, the New Haven records give evidence enough of his father's standing as one of the most substantial citizens of the jurisdiction, to check any surprise at his ranking at the head of a college class.

Of the working and the incidental results of the system, we catch an interesting glimpse in the letters of Judge Paine Wingate of the Harvard class of 1759, written in his ninety-second year, and quoted in Peirce's *History of the University*.<sup>1</sup> In referring to the "excitement—generally called up whenever a class in college was *placed*," he says:—

"The parents were not wholly free from influence; but the scholars were often enraged beyond bounds for their disappointment in their place, and it was some time before a class could be settled down to an acquiescence in their allotment. The highest and the lowest in the class was often ascertained more easily (though not without some difficulty) than the intermediate members of the class; where there was room for uncertainty whose claim was best, and where partiality no doubt was sometimes indulged. But I must add," writes Judge Wingate, "that although the honor of a *place* in the class was chiefly ideal, yet there were some substantial advantages. The higher part of the class had generally the most influential friends, and they commonly had the best chambers in college assigned to them. They had also a right to help themselves first at table in Commons, and I believe generally whenever there was occasional precedence allowed, it was very freely yielded to the higher of the class by those who were below." Judge Wingate could speak from experience, his own rank being eighth in a class of thirty-eight. He writes again:—"The freshman class was, in my day at college, usually

---

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 308-11.

*placed* (as it was termed) within six or nine months after their admission. . . . As soon as the freshmen were apprized of their places, each one took his station according to the new arrangement at recitation, and at Commons, and in the Chapel, and on all other occasions."

Of other college customs, allied to this, the most important were those connected with the maintenance of a system of carefully graded precedence in the college world as a whole; this included, on the one hand, a much more formal behavior of pupils towards teachers than later generations would have relished, and on the other hand a fine development of the institution of fagging. The early Faculty Records of both colleges bear ample witness to these facts. Thus, on almost the first page of the Yale Records, we read on January 9, 1752, "Whereas it appears that Babcock *tertius* [a Freshman] has lately been guilty of Disrespect and Contempt of the Sophimores, and being absent from his Chamber two afternoons successively, with some aggravating Circumstances, 'tis therefore declared that the said Babcock for the Crimes aforesaid, be publicly admonished." Again, on January 18, "Whereas last Tuesday evening, Cary [a Freshman, afterwards a student of theology and a physician], being called before the Sophimores, went out of the Room in Contempt of them, and said these Words, 'I swan I will not stay here any longer,' which is contrary to the Laws of God and this College, it is therefore considered by the President, with the advice of the Tutors, that the said Cary shall be suspended from all the Privileges of this College."

Already, by the time the rule of arrangement by rank was given up, we have evidence that there had begun to be some relaxation of the traditions of undergraduate subordination,<sup>1</sup> and these gradually faded away by the end of the century.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hours at Home, x., 331-333.

What special combination of circumstances led to the abandonment at Yale, for all the undergraduates, in the latter part of the year 1767, of the system of social rank in the class-lists, no record remains to show. In the lack of testimony it may be of interest to quote a brief paragraph from a letter of a junior, David Avery, writing on December 17, 1767, to his old instructor, the Rev. Dr. Wheelock, as follows :

“There appears to be a laudable ambition to excel in knowledge. It is not he that has got the finest coat or largest ruffles that is esteemed here at present. And as the class henceforward are to be placed alphabetically, the students may expect marks of distinction to be put upon the best scholars and speakers.”<sup>1</sup>

We know, of course, that President Clap retired in September, 1766, from the office which he had held for more than a quarter of a century, and that Dr. Daggett, the Professor of Divinity, a much younger man, not yet forty years old, was entrusted for the time being with the duties of the Presidency. We know, too, that Professor Daggett's gifts were not in the line of strict discipline, and that he cared comparatively little for the minutiae of ceremony and the dignity of office ; and it was probably for him personally a welcome step, to discard the elaborate and perplexing system of class-arrangement. We know, moreover,<sup>2</sup> that the practical management of the college at that time was almost wholly left to the three Tutors—the senior Tutor, Ebenezer Baldwin, twenty-two years of age, with Stephen Mix Mitchell, aged twenty-four, and Job Lane, aged twenty-six—all men of exceptional ability and hospitable therefore to new ideas and responsive to new influences. From this point the modern era begins. A citation just made from the letter of an undergraduate shows how, in connection with the abandonment of these antiquated and now artificial

---

<sup>1</sup> Hours at Home, x., 333.    <sup>2</sup> Sprague, Annals of the Amer. Pulpit, i., 637.

class-distinctions, a new emphasis was placed on that which the college really stood for, scholarship and literary training, and by this means the way was cleared for a new and richer future.

And to such a change the rising sentiment of the colonies just then distinctly lent itself. The preceding year had seen the collapse of the attempt to enforce a Stamp Act in America; and the wide-spread indignation against a tax on tea, to take effect on November 1, 1767, was just lifting the curtain on a new scene of approaching rebellion and independence, with which the college and its special friends were mainly in unmistakable sympathy.

The corresponding change at Harvard was effected about two and a half years later, and the accompanying circumstances can be somewhat fully traced. In August, 1769, the College Faculty (then consisting of four Tutors—the Presidency being vacant,) had before them a complaint against the order of arrangement which had been adopted for the class then Sophomores, and on a review of the facts were obliged to revise their former action. The case was that of Samuel Phillips,<sup>1</sup> best known to posterity as the munificent founder of Phillips Academy, Andover, and the point made was that his father had been commissioned as Justice of the Peace and as Justice of the Quorum at earlier dates than the father of Daniel Murray, who was placed next higher, or in the words of the record, “at the head of the sons of Justices.” The matter seems to have brought to a crisis the long-felt dissatisfaction with the system, and to have been the occasion of a report to the Overseers, on May 1, 1770, about six weeks after President Locke’s inauguration, from the committee of that body appointed to make inquiry into the state of the college, etc., to the effect “that the inconveniences attending the method hitherto practiced of placing the Individuals in each class of the

<sup>1</sup> Quincy, *Hist. of Harvard Univ.*, ii., 157, 158; *Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings*, ix., 253, 254; Taylor, *Memoir of Judge Phillips*, 21, 317, 348.

Freshmen according to the supposed Dignity of the Families whereto they severally belong, appear to the Committee to be so great that they have unanimously agreed to report as their opinion that such practice be laid aside, and that for the future the names of the Scholars in each class be placed in alphabetical order." This recommendation was at once consented to, and went into operation without—so far as the records show—being referred to the Corporation for their approval. In putting the vote into effect the class then Freshman, and waiting to be placed, was arranged alphabetically; but the upper classes, which had already been placed by the old system, were retained in that order. On the Catalogue of Graduates, therefore, the alphabetical order does not appear until the class of 1773; while the Yale Catalogue, on the other hand, though proceeding on a vote of only two and a half years earlier, begins its alphabetical arrangement with the class of 1768, which was in its Senior year when the change was adopted here. The new order of things took effect in print first at Yale with the Triennial Catalogue, published in 1769, and at Harvard with the similar publication in 1773.

In this review of the abolition of the custom at Harvard reference should also be made to the fact that from eight to ten years earlier a determined effort had been made in Western Massachusetts to secure the establishment of a new college,<sup>1</sup> at Northampton, Hatfield, or Hadley; and it was understood<sup>2</sup> that the leader in that movement, Colonel Israel Williams (Harvard, 1727), had been largely prompted by chagrin at the low rank accorded to his eldest son in the Harvard class of 1751 (fourteenth in a class of thirty-five, while his father had been tenth in a class of thirty-seven). The project of a college in Hampshire County had been quashed, but the annoyances and risks continually arising

---

<sup>1</sup> Quincy, *Hist. of Harvard Univ.*, ii., 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Mass. Hist. Soc. Proceedings*, xx., 47.



in connection with the administration of the ranking system were growing all the time more formidable.

By the 1st of May, 1770, also, the new American spirit was much more buoyant and defiant than in December, 1767, when Yale had led the way in breaking down the bars of aristocratic precedence. Committees of Correspondence between the different colonies had organized public opinion, and most recently of all the Boston Massacre had tended to knit the community together as one against arbitrary power. It was a good time for any step in the way of abandonment of superior privileges and dignities, the prerogatives of rank and station.

The old custom, however, died hard; and it may be a surprise to the present generation to learn that, nominally at any rate, degradation continued to be a recognized penalty in the college for at least half a century longer. The Records of the Faculty (or the Immediate Government, as the phrase then was) contain abundant evidence for some years later than 1770 that, notwithstanding the classification by social rank had been abandoned in the catalogues, it was still found convenient to keep up some system of placing the students otherwise than alphabetically, and punishing by alterations in this order. A sample of a number of such penalties is a vote of October 11, 1782,<sup>1</sup> by which Rowe is degraded to the bottom of his class, and is to "take his place accordingly in the Chappel and meeting house and on all occasions when the class appears before the governors of the college." Still later, in October, 1789, Joseph Dennie, whose brief literary career was so felicitously described by the Rev. Dr. Peabody in the Council Report of four years ago, was degraded ten places. I am not aware of any similar entries after this, but the various editions of the College Laws continue to enumerate degradation as one of the established penalties down to and

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier instance is quoted in Hall's Collection of College Words and Customs, s. v. *Degradation*, p. 94.

including the issue of 1820; the next issue, that of 1825, omits the familiar phrase, and we are at liberty to surmise that in the latter part of the time when the name was thus continued in the Laws, the penalty was a dead letter, unless in the form of degradation to a lower class.<sup>1</sup> There was nothing at Yale corresponding to this so-to-speak *post-mortem* existence of a discarded system.

I have failed entirely to trace the adoption of the custom by any other of the American colleges. Of those in New England, the next in age is Brown University, but no students were entered there until 1765, and none were graduated until 1769; by which time it was out of the question for a new institution to adopt a custom so nearly worn out. Still less could it have taken root at Dartmouth College, which began in 1770, or in any of the later growths of this region.

In the Middle Colonies, the College of New Jersey began in 1747, and Columbia in 1754, while the University of Pennsylvania was first chartered as a college in 1753; but so far as I can learn, none of these at any time followed the rule of arrangement by family rank. The same is true of the College of William and Mary, of whose development in the ante-revolutionary period even fewer memorials remain.

Of customs of similar import outside, it may be sufficient to instance the New-England and more lastingly the Connecticut habit of dignifying the meeting-house. This annual allotment of seats for Congregational worship was, as we all know, the work of a committee appointed from time to time for the purpose, who were supposed to be guided in their decisions mainly by regard to family descent, wealth, social standing, age, and general usefulness to the community,—or as the Glastonbury (Connecticut) record puts it, “age, state, and parentage.”<sup>2</sup> In Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1719, for the purpose of this allotment one year

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Tillinghast, of the Harvard Library, for calling my attention to this survival.

<sup>2</sup> Chapin, Glastonbury Centennial, 79.

in age was ordered to count as the equivalent of £4 on the tax-list,<sup>1</sup> that is, a man one year younger but paying £4 more of taxes than another, would be entitled to an equally good seat; while later in the century, in the adjoining township of Southington, £15 was required to balance an additional year of age, and after 1800 even as high as £80.<sup>2</sup> Military titles were also in some places a ground of special dignity.

This quaint relic of unrepublican distinctions disappeared in most localities before the present century, lingering awhile later in a few specially secluded or conservative congregations, as in East Hartford, Connecticut, until 1824,<sup>3</sup> and latest of all in the remote parish of Norfolk, Connecticut, where it was retained—more as a form than as a reality—until so recent a date as 1875.<sup>4</sup> To those who know that picturesque village, rarely favored by nature, and now made doubly attractive by the good taste and unremitting care of those who love it, there is an added charm in identifying it as the last refuge of the latest surviving usage in evidence of the special deference paid to social rank in the earlier generations of New England.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bronson, *Hist. of Waterbury*, 223.

<sup>2</sup> Timlow, *Sketches of Southington*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> Goodwin, *East Hartford*, 132.

<sup>4</sup> Bassett and Beach, *Centennial Discourses*, 54.











378.198

D526o

Dexter

On some social distinctions  
at Harvard and Yale, before  
the Revolution

378.198

D526o

Dexter

On some social distinctions at  
Harvard and Yale, before the  
Revolution

